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ABSTRACT

The housing crisis in the United States is primarily urban. Unlike areas of urban blight, rural slums are not slums of despair by any means. "Slums of despair" is a term used in a recent study of urban life to describe those areas in some of our inner cities whose inhabitants feel they are utterly trapped--that they stand little chance of improving their lot. In the study, these desperate regions were contrasted with so-called "slums of hope," where there was some visible evidence that government or the community was committed to building new housing or rehabilitating what existed, as well as to creating jobs. This book is concerned with the ways in which America's hopeless slums might be turned into healthy communities. In city after city, the reduction of housing stock has far outstripped the total construction of new housing. The reasons for this erosion of badly needed low-rent housing are complex. Housing subsidies--which means, primarily, subsidies for land acquisition, mortgage interest and rent--are absolutely essential if new housing is to be created to meet the needs of low-income families. But successive administrations and a Congress not particularly responsive to urban problems have cut back and will continue to cut back such subsidies, and so these indispensable programs are dying on the vine. (Author/JM)

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Our Housing Mess

...AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT

By PETER BLAKE, F.A.I.A.

Foreword by STEWART L. UDALL
Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior

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The cover picture illustrates the demolition by blasting of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, noted in the third chapter. Photo by courtesy of ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH.

Contents

Foreword, *by Stewart L. Udall*	7
Preface, *by Bertram H. Gold*	9
The Nature of the Crisis	13
New Housing—Where?	20
What Kinds of Housing?	37
What Kinds of Subsidies?	54
A Second Chance	65
Information Sources	75

About the Author

PETER BLAKE, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, was trained at the University of Pennsylvania and Pratt Institute, and has designed many private houses as well as churches, synagogues and exhibition structures, mainly in and near New York City. He has served as Curator of the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and as editor of *Architectural Forum* magazine. At present he is editor in chief of *Architecture Plus*. His five books include *The Master Builders: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright* (1960) and *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape* (1964).

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P.B.

Foreword

By STEWART L. UDALL
Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior

As long as America had space to spare, there was always a margin for error that often enabled us to rescue ourselves from our worst mistakes. Although most 19th-century American cities had slums and ghettos, their sharp edges were not as destructive of human values as they might have been, because in the "good ghettos" people cared about other people and shared their burdens—and because even the worst slums usually were near open spaces or clean rivers, where the disadvantaged could maintain some acquaintance with life-giving natural environments.

But in the 20th century, asphalt jungles and "bad ghettos" have developed into urban environments that are wholly dehumanizing. This trend often defeats the best efforts of communities to establish or preserve neighborhoods where good intergroup relations can thrive and where the human spirit can grow.

The human spirit under urban conditions is what Peter Blake's book is really about. While the book deals, ostensibly, with technical matters like building types and housing subsidies, his intention is to supply a vision of an urban existence in which children will not be trapped in housing that may stunt their growth; in which workers will not waste their lives traveling for irretrievable hours to distant jobs; in which citizens will have no reason to fear or hate other citizens.

We can have this kind of urban existence, Mr. Blake suggests, if we muster the political will to pull the pieces together.

Ecologists have learned that all things are interconnected—that no part of an environment can be considered as an island, separate from the adjacent parts. By the same token, Mr. Blake explains, we cannot go on dealing with the various factors that go into the making of the urban fabric as if they were isolated realities. Factors like the exigencies of land cost, the need for elbow room, the economies of mass housing, the amenities of small-scale building, the promises of new technologies, the vested interests of entrepreneurs and unions, the law's delays and the urgencies of human misery must be carefully considered and effectively balanced—not from above by some all-powerful planning agency, Mr. Blake believes, but through a creative dialogue by people in their own communities.

At a time when our urban communities seem to many to be crumbling, Peter Blake sounds a note of hope. It is a cautious note, and rightly so, for the battle to save our urban environments from disaster has only begun. Yet I believe, as Blake does, that if we bend every effort to get such a dialogue started, we can build cities that will again be socially and environmentally livable.

8

Preface

By BERTRAM H. GOLD
Executive Vice President, The American Jewish Committee

The American Jewish Committee—the oldest human relations agency in the United States—has been dedicated throughout its nearly seven decades to the vision of an America in which all citizens will be fully secure in their rights and able to enjoy the rewards and benefits which the society offers. For this reason, the AJC over the years has increasingly concerned itself with discrimination and collective disabilities suffered not only by Jews but by many other religious, ethnic and racial groups.

For many years, housing has been an important front in this struggle. In 1947 and again in 1952, when the U.S. Supreme Court was reviewing the use of restrictive covenants to exclude minority group members (in those cases Blacks and "non-Caucasians") from residential neighborhoods, the AJC together with other Jewish groups submitted crucial *amici curiae* briefs which argued that such covenants were not enforceable through the law. The Court, in its rulings, upheld this view.

Since those days, the AJC has steadily broadened its involvement in housing problems—from fighting discrimination in existing housing to championing the creation of more homes open to all. Long before there were any fair-housing laws, we fought for non-discriminatory policies in housing built with public aid: first in government-constructed projects, later in government-assisted private home building such as suburban developments covered by Federal Housing Authority mortgage insurance. In court case after court case, AJC briefs hammered home the principle of fair housing.

9

Nor have our activities been limited to the legal sphere. In a number of localities, AJC chapters and leaders have helped to get integrated housing programs started. And when it became apparent that residential patterns tended to isolate working-class people, both Black and White, from new job opportunities in suburbs, the AJC formed a National Job-Linked Housing Center to help industries and communities provide homes where the jobs are. Implicit in undertakings like these has been the realization that inadequate housing, inequitable housing and the general condition of our cities are critical intergroup and interracial issues—issues with often devastating secondary effects on education, employment and public safety.

Obviously, solutions can be found only with the help of aroused and informed citizens. To help arouse and inform the citizenry, we have invited a distinguished urban critic to write the present book. In these pages Peter Blake, the noted architect and architectural editor, assesses the lack and the defects of housing for the less affluent, diagnoses the plight of urban areas, traces the historical and economic causes and suggests certain remedies. For example, he deals realistically with such tough problems as the advantages and drawbacks of "infill" or "scatter-site" housing and spot rehabilitation as against the wholesale bulldozer approach, or the implications of the energy crisis for future planning that will link jobs and homes.

Mr. Blake recognizes that housing issues, which for years have been fought over in bitter intermittent confrontations, will continue to plague the nation for years to come. Indeed, his analysis suggests that the tension may rise still more before things get better. Yet he is no alarmist. If his worry is deep and his occasional anger is strong, so are his commitment to a better future and his ability to make us visualize it. His counsel will be of help to professionals in the field of housing, to government and corporate officials, and to the rest of us who need to know more so that we can help increase the supply of decent housing for *all* Americans.

Author's Note

Although the immediate concern of this book is with housing, its underlying concern is with intergroup relations.

It is clear that good housing cannot relax intergroup tensions by itself. But it is equally clear that bad housing—or the wrong kind of housing, in the wrong location—can prevent the relaxation of such tensions. It can do so by creating *de facto* ghettos; by forcing families with young children into molds that do not fit them, thereby encouraging juvenile delinquency and adult crime; by locating poor people far from good jobs and good educational and cultural opportunities, thus perpetuating high unemployment in groups already suffering from that curse; by maintaining school segregation to the detriment of both White and Black children.

In short, while this book contains a certain amount of technical material specifically related to the creation of new and better housing stock, it really looks to the possible uses of housing in creating a more equitable society in the United States—a society with fewer economic, racial and cultural imbalances, and with more nearly equal opportunities for all its members.

P.B.

11

The Nature of the Crisis

By the standards of some of the so-called underdeveloped nations, the people of the United States are luxuriously housed. There are some 67.7 million year-round residential units for some 206.2 million Americans—and most of those units are reasonably well constructed and wired, equipped with plumbing, heating and sometimes even air-conditioning. Many of our homes are blessed with private outdoor space of varying size: large ranches or farms, pleasant suburban gardens, urban backyards, perfectly usable balconies. Moreover, a large percentage of our housing stock is reasonably well served by paved streets, sewers, garbage collection, police and fire protection, electric power, telephones, nearby schools and shops, extensive health facilities. There are street lights at fairly regular intervals; there are mailboxes and fire hydrants. And some 110 million automobiles are parked somewhere near those 67.7 million residential units to take us away from it all when the charm begins to pall.

Thus, to a citizen of, say, Calcutta, it would no doubt seem almost grotesque to talk of a housing crisis in the United States.

Or would it? One afternoon not long ago, a French-Canadian documentary film maker who had been spending a year assembling footage for a TV program on urban problems came to see me in my office. He had spent the morning walking through the South Bronx, and he was visibly shaken. "Nothing I have seen anywhere in the past 12 months—absolutely nothing—was as bad as this," he said. He, as a matter of fact, *had* visited and filmed Calcutta.

The housing crisis in the United States, then, is not uniform in its effects. In fact, it is hard to make the inhabitants of places like Michigan's Upper Peninsula or California's Orange County understand what one is talking about when discussing the decay of our inner cities. For the crisis is, above all, an inner-city phenomenon. True, there are rural slums in the United States as well; there are small towns—usually former company towns—that have been abandoned or bypassed by industry and other forms of "progress" and now seem comatose. But unlike the areas of urban blight, these are not slums of despair by any means.

"Slums of despair" is a term used in a recent study of urban life to describe those areas in some of our inner cities whose inhabitants feel they are utterly trapped—that they stand little chance of improving their lot. Since in most American cities today poverty is largely synonymous with a black skin or Spanish-speaking ancestry, such neighborhoods more often than not are racial or ethnic ghettos. In the study, these desperate regions were contrasted with so-called "slums of hope," where there seemed to be a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel—where there was some visible evidence that government or the community was committed to building new housing or rehabilitating what existed, as well as to creating jobs.

This book is concerned with the ways in which America's hopeless slums might be turned into healthy communities.

The Dynamics of Decay

Once it is understood that the housing crisis in the United States is primarily urban, it becomes necessary to be a little more specific.

In city after city, the reduction of housing stock through abandonment, decay, fire, vandalism and demolition (to make way for something more profitable) has, during the past dozen years or so, far outstripped the total construction of new housing. Moreover, almost invariably the housing lost to our cities

and their people was low in rent, while the replacement, as far as it goes, has been predominantly attuned to middle-income or upper-middle-income tenants. In a study conducted in New York City by Dr. Frank Kristof for the New York State Urban Development Corporation, it was found that between 1968 and 1971 the city had lost around 40,000 low-rent dwelling units per year, but had built only about half that number of new (and relatively high-rent) units. And the story in some other American cities is similarly depressing.

The reasons for this erosion of badly needed low-rent housing are complex; they will be discussed in some detail in this book. Basically, of course, they have to do with the drift in our urban economy. Increasing real estate taxation discourages rehabilitation by private landlords; it encourages the razing of buildings that produce only minimal rents and cost too much to maintain—and it further encourages the construction of higher-rent housing which, it is hoped, will enable landlords to bail themselves out while also generating tax revenue for strapped cities.

Where Are the Subsidies?

Housing subsidies—which means, primarily, subsidies for land acquisition, mortgage interest and rent—are absolutely essential if new housing is to be created to meet the needs of low-income families. But successive administrations and a Congress not particularly responsive to urban problems have cut back and will continue to cut back such subsidies, and so these indispensable programs are dying on the vine. In a recent analysis of an Urban Renewal project planned for a 20-block site next to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, it was found that the Nixon Administration's withdrawal of the so-called Section 236 subsidies meant rents would have had to be doubled, from $40 to $80 per room—which made the entire project an absurdity in terms of what families temporarily displaced in that particular area could possibly afford to pay.

For nearly every one of these massive exercises in urban surgery involves not only the acquisition and clearance of slum properties, but also the relocation (temporary, it is hoped) of families that occupy those slums. All of this preparatory work is enormously expensive in terms of cash as well as social dislocation; but nobody, to date, has discovered a way of reconstructing built-up areas without dislocating the families who presently occupy them, or the small businesses that both support and serve many of them. There have been more sophisticated renewal tactics in recent years—for example, keeping families and businesses in a kind of "holding pattern" until a next-door site is cleared and reconstructed, and then giving them a chance to move into the new buildings. But even that sort of urban shell game involves a great deal of initial uprooting and relocating; and given the great time lag frequently entailed, the existing social fabric is often disrupted.

There are ways of avoiding this—through temporary mobile housing erected in renewal neighborhoods, for example—but such procedures involve even higher costs and subsidies, at a time when it seems impossible to obtain needed subsidies even for the basic tasks. The problem in a society that thinks of itself as affluent, as the United States does, is that those who aren't affluent are swept under the rug. Thus, the "affluent society" seems unwilling or unable to supply decent low-cost housing to the 20 or 30 per cent who try to escape from the slums.

A Progress (?) Report

Here are a few, somewhat disjointed facts which, added up, should afford a fairly clear understanding of the housing situation in the United States today.

Fact No. 1: In his Housing Act of 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson persuaded Congress to aim at the construction of 26 million dwelling units by 1978, or 2.6 million units a year. Both L.B.J. and Congress considered that figure an absolute minimum.

Fact No. 2: The performance, to date, has been 1.50 million in 1969, 1.46 million in 1970, 1.85 million in 1971, 2.38 million in 1972.

Fact No. 3: Over one-quarter of these housing units were built in rural areas. Of the rest, it is fair to assume that at least two-thirds were built in suburbs rather than center cities. In other words, about three-quarters of the more than 7 million units built in the U.S. from 1969 to 1972 were constructed by private developers of suburban or rural tracts, subsidized by Federal Housing Administration mortgage insurance, and sold primarily to White, middle-American families, many of whom had fled to suburbia from increasingly impoverished and increasingly nonwhite cities and city schools.

Fact No. 4: Of the more than 7 million units built in 1969-72, only 1.4 million were Federally subsidized to assist poor or lower-middle and middle-income families, urban or otherwise.

Fact No. 5: The 1970 Census reported a significant population decline in inner cities and a major increase in the suburbs. But it is almost a certainty that censuses, while counting suburbanites accurately, fail to count hundreds of thousands of the urban poor—partly because census takers are afraid to go from door to door in the slums, partly because welfare recipients dodge them for fear of revealing facts that might jeopardize their benefits. The net effect is to keep the inner cities' representation in Congress below what it should be. Central cities are losing Congressional clout as it is, because in most metropolitan areas the suburbs' real share of the population keeps growing. Between this and undercounting, pressures on Congress to worry about the inner cities are being markedly reduced, at a time when inner-city populations actually may not be reduced at all and inner-city problems certainly are not.

Fact No. 6: In the first Nixon Administration, under Housing and Urban Development Secretary George Romney, more Federally subsidized housing was built than ever before; but in January 1973, the Federal Government decided overnight to

dismantle almost every housing subsidy and public housing program (as well as open-space, environmental-protection and rehabilitation programs, and innumerable others) painstakingly devised by the New Deal and the Fair Deal and the New Frontier and the Great Society over 40 years. The reason given was that these programs had not worked. Admittedly, they had not worked as smoothly as one might have hoped; but then, no comparable hatchet job was ever contemplated for concurrent government-subsidized armament programs, which had also had their share of malfunctioning. Perhaps the real reason was that the housing programs had not generated a sufficient number of votes for the benefactors.

And so, in terms of urban housing, we are now where we stood almost 50 years ago. Most of the housing being built is for the well-to-do or those about to be; in all but a few cities, most of the housing available to those who do not quite make that grade will continue to be hand-me-down; and for the rest of our people, there will always be the American slum. True, the Nixon Administration, late in 1973, proposed a new system of rent and home-purchase subsidies; but the proposals, while well-intentioned, were poorly conceived and thus seem unlikely to see the light of day in the form in which they were submitted to Congress. Meanwhile, there are no programs at all, on the Federal level, to help people move out of the slums of despair—or, for that matter, out of the slums of hope.

The Specter of Disintegration

All of us are aware, of course, of the ongoing need for more housing that is routinely created by population growth—though, thanks to the Pill, the projections seem less reliable today than they did a dozen years ago.

But the real problems have not arisen from population growth, at least not primarily. They are due to population shifts from antiquated inner-city housing to spick-and-span suburban developments; to shifts of millions of families (often

with more children and fewer skills than average) from reservoirs of poverty in the Caribbean and the rural South into urban areas of apparent promise; and to the consequent overcrowding of already dilapidated housing in those areas. Meanwhile, jobs are disappearing from there, as industries move to suburbia.

Possibly, a superficial statistic might demonstrate that there really is no housing shortage at all in this country—that while our inner cities are being depleted (or are deteriorating) at a rapid rate, our suburbs are being enriched at an even more rapid pace.

But a deeper analysis would clearly prove that this shift from the inner city to suburbia reflects a deepening alienation between the disadvantaged and the advantaged in American society—and that the housing crisis in our cities is, in fact, a reflection of the basic urban crisis, of the terrifying disintegration of American urban life.

A dozen years ago, I wrote that our cities might soon be inhabited solely by the very poor and the very rich, with battalions of armed police deployed to protect the latter from the former. It was an entirely plausible prediction; still, I did not expect it to come true so quickly. In many cities, though not all, it is being realized very rapidly indeed.

Many years before I was born, a philosopher wrote: "Men come to the city to live; they remain there to live the good life." In recent years, many men (and women and children) have come to the American city to live, indeed to live better. Too often, though, they have remained there not because they were living the good life, but because they were trapped.

New Housing—Where?

It is often said that the United States and certain other nations are, in effect, assemblages of huge urban areas, some of them consisting of several large cities that have, over the years, coalesced to form enormous "megalopolises," with populations running in the tens of millions each and growing. To someone who does not know the scene, the term "megalopolis" might suggest that these huge urban areas are more or less homogeneous—that their inhabitants share common hopes, fears and interests.

Unhappily, this is, of course, not the case at all. It is an oversimplification to speak of urban areas or megalopolises as if they were analogous to the city states of old. Except for a few large urban areas enlightened enough to have formed a metropolitan government structure which automatically expands as the area expands (as Toronto has done), and which uses *all* the resources of its area for the benefit of *all* its constituents, today's megalopolis is heterogeneous, to put it mildly—and hopelessly split, to put it more accurately.

The Clash of Interests

A huge urban area that looks, on a planner's map, like a single, continuous and rather jolly blob extending from, say, Boston to Richmond, and encompassing a happy throng of 30 or 40 or 50 million Americans, is, in fact, a sadly and sometimes bitterly fragmented hodgepodge of slums, other urban residential areas, suburbs, industrial parks, resorts, office areas, shopping centers, more slums, parking lots and neon strips—all joined

together, more or less, by hundreds of miles of superhighways, built at enormous cost by a society that loves the automobile more than it loves itself. This fragmented hodgepodge is inhabited by people whose self-interests, more often than not, clash head-on, whose political representatives (at the state and the Federal level) reflect widely differing views on such seemingly nonpolitical matters as subsidies for mass transit and for housing, and whose incomes range from the astronomical to the below-subsistence level. The urban blobs that look so jolly on the map actually are angry, divided communities with few common concerns, and with innumerable local concerns at odds with those of neighboring localities.

Nowhere do the residents differ more than in their views of housing needs. To a comfortable and reasonably well-heeled suburbanite, for example, the central city is not a place to live but merely a promising job market; he or she would like to see it become a neat collection of pleasant office buildings, surrounded by parking lots and linked to suburbia by the widest and most efficient expressway we are capable of constructing. As for the urban poor, and their irritating problems, he may prefer simply to erase them from his consciousness; and so he tends to vote against measures that would open the suburbs to people aspiring to live there who now are effectively barred by zoning and other restrictions.

Meanwhile, the poor, who actually live in the central city, want it redesigned to offer vastly greater job opportunities to them and vastly better educational opportunities to their children. Their image of an ideal city is that of a good place to live, study and work in. Their preoccupation is with mobility—easy access, by mass transit if possible, to desirable jobs and schools; their housing problem (and, for that matter, that of the urban middle class) is not solved simply by providing inexpensive shelter, but is intimately bound up with questions of location.

As things stand, the tax structure and the votes in legislatures tend to support the viewpoint of the suburbanites, not

that of the city dwellers. And so most of our housing subsidies, in the form of F.H.A.-insured mortgages, have benefitted suburbia—indeed, built it. Without F.H.A.'s mortgage insurance, the 40 million or so residential units built in the U.S. during the 25 years after the end of World War II (largely in suburbs and rural areas) would never have seen the light of day; without the 42,500 miles of new interstate highways begun in 1956 (and, as of this writing, three-quarters complete), these new homes could not have been placed within reach of the most attractive job markets.

The cities, on the other hand, where the drama of the housing crisis is being acted out, have few powerful spokesmen at the Federal or state level. As noted earlier, the urban poor frequently do not respond to the census; they also frequently do not register to vote. For both reasons, the cities have been losing political clout. Meanwhile, they have some very powerful enemies to contend with—enemies not necessarily acting from malice, but from self-interest. The highway lobby, for example, isn't actually trying to keep the inner-city poor from getting to good jobs; but it wants to keep interstate funds earmarked for asphalt and concrete, and out of mass transit—which, unfortunately, has precisely that effect.

Access and Land Cost

Over the past 100 years or so, certain patterns of urban development have tended to promote the fragmentation of cities into areas of special use. Zoning policy has established exclusively residential, commercial or industrial districts and has curbed mixed uses.

The results of this misguided policy are still with us, and they obviously intensify problems of housing location. Most planners today favor mixed-use zoning, which would not only create housing in proximity to job opportunities (reducing the load on mass transit facilities and highways and, incidentally, equalizing the loads on utilities and other energy sources over

the typical seven-day week), but would also intensify the week-round use of streets and thus reduce the likelihood of off-hour crime. Fortunately, such mixed-use zoning is now becoming increasingly accepted, especially where nuisance-free industries and commercial establishments are concerned.

Still, much existing housing—and most potential sites for new housing—will be found in areas relatively distant from job opportunities. Worse still, the governmental structure of many cities makes it hard to provide schools and other educational and community facilities in close proximity to large new housing developments—at least simultaneously with the construction of the developments. Also, housing and renewal programs tend to concentrate so single-mindedly on just one strand in the urban fabric, the creation of dwelling units, that it often becomes difficult to mesh in the equally essential strands of shopping and other commercial services.

Some of this is slowly changing, if not by policy, then by demand. Even mass transit is eventually provided for large new communities that were originally planned, incomprehensibly, without any regard for access to jobs, stores or schools. (Co-op City, in the Bronx, New York City, is a case in point—60,000 people initially left stranded in the middle of nowhere!)

But location of new housing is not only a matter of transportation or support facilities. The cost of urban land has been allowed to reach such astronomical heights that there is no way of building low- or middle-income housing in most parts of our cities without subsidies that, in effect, absorb those astronomical costs. Indeed, in most U.S. cities today, the chief difference between luxury apartments and low-income or middle-income ones is a matter of land costs. Plush and cheap apartment buildings are likely to be constructed of the same sort of concrete frame, with the same sort of masonry skin, with the same utilities and services, and roughly with the same room sizes. The *main* difference is that the plush apartments are constructed on land that may have cost $500 per square

foot, while the cheap apartments stand on land bought by some public agency under a subsidy program that absorbs land costs, or on property exempted from real estate taxation under another form of subsidy.

Fix Up or Tear Down?

The location of new housing is also affected by the kind of land or rehabilitable structures available. Most planners and architects today would prefer to preserve as much of the urban fabric as they can. They would prefer to rehabilitate existing buildings, constructing new housing (and related facilities) only on vacant lots, in a sort of infill pattern. They feel this way largely because the Urban Renewal experience of the 1950s and 1960s has proved to be about as sensitive an act of urban surgery as the Hiroshima bomb. Though it provided a great many perfectly decent apartments at fairly reasonable rents, the bulldozer approach of the 1950s and 1960s tended to destroy communities instead of reinforcing them.

Unfortunately, both infill housing and rehabilitation of older buildings, while socially (and architecturally) preferable to the bulldozer approach, invariably cost a great deal more. The reason is obvious: The major economies in housing construction are the result of on-site management techniques. Efficient and economical builders are efficient and economical because they know how to turn a great big urban wasteland into a kind of outdoor factory, where mechanized-construction crews excavate foundations, pour concrete, install plumbing, wiring and heating, lay bricks and paint partitions in carefully orchestrated movements that entail little waste. The key to this efficiency is the nature of the unobstructed wasteland, with on-site prefabricating and storage opportunities, and with no functioning facilities to get in the way.

Everybody who has had anything to do with urban housing knows that scatter-site or infill housing, or rehabilitated housing in existing buildings, can help produce an infinitely more

desirable community than the kind almost invariably produced by the bulldozer approach. But everybody so convinced also knows that the costs of this more sensitive approach to urban surgery are so high that only added subsidies, from government or private sources, can make the effort even remotely feasible. It is therefore encouraging to see the Nixon Administration, in advocating various kinds of housing supplements, recognize (at least by implication) that subsidies to infill or fix-up operations are preferable to the bulldozer approach.

Blockbusters—Where?

Given the inherently high cost of housing on small and scattered sites, it seems inevitable that most new housing will continue to be located on fairly large acreage assembled in various ways—not only on cleared slum sites, but on so-called air rights over various kinds of public buildings or over public rights of way, such as railroad tracks or yards.

When communities of considerable size are constructed within existing cities, the problem becomes one of integration. Not racial or economic integration primarily (although that has recently appeared to be the case in a number of abrasive situations), but integration in social and in architectural terms—in terms, really, of urban scale.

A blockbuster-type development of dozens of 30-story concrete and brick towers, plunked down in the middle of a residential community of two- and three-story one-family houses, will and *should* raise hackles in the neighborhood, whether or not the new neighbors differ from it in racial or economic terms. This sort of development—the widely built and almost as widely admired "project" of the 1930s, '40s, '50s and '60s—is a visual and psychological outrage, as much an offense to its established neighbors as to those who live in it. When such a "project" is a subsidized low-income effort, those who live in it are forever stigmatized as being among our poorest; and when it is a middle-income effort (also subsidized), those who live in it

still are stigmatized as newcomers to the neighborhood. Even a luxury high-rise development will be resented—for displacing residents, adding to traffic and parking problems, and blocking views, if not for the character of its inhabitants.

The design of large-scale communities in our cities is, therefore, a delicate task. It requires much greater sensitivity than is normally displayed by public agencies, or by most architects who normally work for such agencies. The sad example of the Forest Hills public housing project in Queens, New York City, which caused so much friction in the early 1970s, is as good a case in point as any.

In Forest Hills, an early scheme, by an excellent architect sensitive to the neighborhood situation, suggested that so large a new public housing community within an established neighborhood should be scaled to relate to the existing small houses. His plan envisioned low-rise town houses, for families with children, on the periphery of the project area—town houses quite properly in scale with the existing neighborhood. Next, there were to be medium-rise apartments, and finally, at the center of the area, there were to be three 16-story towers that would contain smaller units. Pedestrian walkways were to link these buildings to each other and to the existing community that adjoined.

The proposal was rejected by the authorities as being too costly (and, perhaps, too off-beat); an absurdity of mammoth towers was substituted. This plan, totally out of scale with its neighborhood, became an issue that created deplorable animosities—animosities caused at least as much by brutal design as by brutal race prejudice or opposition to bringing in poor people. Many supporters of the project became enemies when the design was changed. The controversy added so much to the actual dollar cost of the endeavor that it would have been much cheaper to proceed with the earlier proposal.

All of which suggests that questions of architectural and urban scale, though not always understood as such by the lay

public, are issues as real in the location and the shaping of new communities within existing cities as are race or class.

Other issues have to do with displacement of people through demolition, with destruction of historic or sentimental landmarks, and with changes in the general complexion of the community, including the complexion of its schools.[1] These issues, quite familiar to all of us, are not to be passed over lightly. The fact is that insensitive planning and design often exacerbate situations that could, quite possibly, be ameliorated by an architect with more sensitivity.

The Suburban Alternative

Although urban housing, its quality, quantity and location, has presented some of the most visible problems in the past several decades, housing in suburbs and in rural areas is hardly the panacea it is often thought to be.

Suburban development, which has accounted for most of the huge U.S. housing boom since World War II, is what happens when everyone—first families, then corporations—runs away from the center-city blues. One of its earmarks to date has been lack of coherent planning by which new problems might have been avoided. For example, houses have been built miles from jobs, or businesses relocated in areas with no nearby labor force. As a result, masses of people must commute, not along well-defined channels, which might be served by public transit, but in an anarchic criss-cross pattern, which usually is possible only by car. Though it wasn't necessarily meant that

1. American planners have begun to question the validity of today's "superschools" altogether. Many believe that decentralized teaching facilities, possibly scattered through the community much as little stores used to be scattered through neighborhoods, offer far better opportunities for education, as well as for social and racial integration. That, in any event, is the rationale behind decentralized, neighborhood-controlled schools. Unhappily, the intent has often been perverted so as to reinforce segregation. Clearly, there cannot be much hope for integrated schools unless housing is integrated first.

way, this has cut off the poorer, carless people from those jobs. And now that we can no longer count on ample supplies of gasoline, one wonders whether we really need any more of this sort of development.

Waste of energy in transportation is merely the latest inefficiency of suburban life to come to our notice. Other problems that have arisen in F.H.A.-subsidized housing developments of the conventional type are fairly familiar. They range from the monotony of single-use zoning to the burdensome tax rates required to support schools and other services for communities made up, very largely, of "typical" families with two or three school-age children; from the lack of open communal space to the lack of identifiable focal points that might give the community some character; from uniformity in income levels to uniformity in terms of age or race or cultural interests.

Yet, despite these shortcomings, suburban development contains social, economic and political resources that will probably permit our vast "slurbs" (as they are sometimes referred to in California) to survive without too much trouble. The uniformity of suburbia is likely to attract taxpaying industries looking for stable and reasonably skilled employees; the suburbanites' predictably above-median incomes will interest service industries that hope to prosper in such a climate; and the growing clout wielded by suburban voting blocs may be counted on to assure a helping hand at the county, state or Federal level.

It is not impossible that a new kind of community will emerge from these rather pragmatic visions. It will not be the kind of community that city planners, enamored of Florence or Siena, would recognize—and this, of course, is regrettable. But it could be a community that will perfectly mirror an increasingly egalitarian, "mid-cult" society, in which face-to-face encounters are replaced by closed-circuit TV, and the cathedral and its piazza are replaced by the shopping center. In any event, suburbia does not lack the resources to shape that kind of future for itself.

The Countryside: No Idyll

Contrary to popular belief, substandard housing is not confined to urban slums, although its social implications are most threatening there. Rural regions, which also lack the kind of political clout suburbia commands, have a great deal of it. According to the 1970 Census, nonmetropolitan areas (most of them rural) contained almost 1½ times as many households living in substandard housing as did metropolitan areas (which embrace suburbs and inner cities); and the percentage of occupied housing rated as substandard was almost twice as high in nonmetropolitan as in metropolitan areas.

Clay L. Cochran, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Rural Housing Coalition, has stated that two-thirds of all substandard housing in the U.S. in 1971 was outside the so-called Standard Metropolitan Areas (S.M.A.s). Cochran claimed that 34,000 communities outside those areas lacked modern sanitation, and noted that the First National Rural Housing Conference, held in 1970, had determined the need for new and rehabilitated rural housing to be 13.5 million units, of which 7 million (or 700,000 a year over a 10-year period) would have to be subsidized.

Rural incomes are, of course, lower than incomes in metropolitan areas. The median income for a nonmetropolitan family is only about three-quarters of that for an S.M.A. family—and for a Black rural family it is even less. As Cochran points out, "agri-business" has long been exempt from laws governing minimum wages, minimum hours, unemployment compensation, organized labor safeguards and related collective bargaining laws, as well as from some aspects of Social Security coverage. So the workers in "agri-business," most of whom have even less political clout than the urban poor, also do not possess very much economic clout with which to obtain decent housing. The great involuntary mobility of many of these rural laborers—those who are migrant workers—reduces their political and economic power even further.

In rural areas, financing is the key problem in starting new housing. Even the stable population there has trouble obtaining the sort of housing routinely available in suburbs, because adequate credit facilities are lacking. Small towns and rural areas do not have the kinds of private lending institutions that can be found in most suburban communities. Private financing, when it can be found at all, is usually available on more restrictive terms (higher interest rates, shorter maturity, larger down payments); and the F.H.A. has rarely shown any more interest in insuring loans in rural areas than in inner-city ghettos. Moreover, public housing, the most effective government program for making homes available to the poor, has been all but unknown outside urban areas.

One reason is that the scattered distribution of rural dwellers makes public housing as we know it rather unsuitable for meeting their needs. Federal funds for public housing are not spent directly but are channeled through localities; and rural communities are rarely large enough, or adequately organized, to house their poor efficiently through such programs. It is true that the Farmers Home Administration (sometimes abbreviated "Fm.H.A.," so as to distinguish it from the better-known F.H.A.) exists to provide direct loans to rural people who cannot get credit elsewhere "on terms and conditions . . . they reasonably could be expected to fulfill." But such low-interest loans are limited, by statute, to communities with populations of not more than 10,000—on the presumption that larger communities can conduct their own publicly subsidized programs. Meanwhile, the Federal Housing Administration does very little in localities of fewer than 25,000 inhabitants, so there is a credit gap in housing that leaves out communities with populations from 10,000 to 25,000.

Though limited, the Farmers Home Administration is our one effective housing program for rural areas. The obvious ways to make it even more effective are to expand its limits to cover communities up to 25,000 people, to let it make loans at higher

risks than it does now, and to provide it with more money for administrative work—since, unlike other subsidy programs, it needs by its very nature to involve itself in the details of translating subsidies into actual buildings. Another way to expand present Fm.H.A. programs might be to adopt procedures now followed in Norway, where—in addition to the basic interest subsidy—the government defers payment on up to half the principal, which is then secured by a second mortgage.

The Vision of the New Town

Ever since World War II, in the U.S. and elsewhere, one of the favorite panaceas proposed for absorbing families inadequately housed in cities, suburbs or rural areas has been the creation of so-called New Towns. The theory is that New Towns can and should be built to provide a desirable racial, social and economic mix—with built-in industrial and agricultural job opportunities—for people trapped in situations where such a mix is difficult or impossible to achieve.

There is, of course, nothing new about New Towns in the U.S. They have sprung up in many places and for different reasons for more than 100 years. Some of them developed around economic opportunities—e.g., mining, crossroads, ports, or artificially (and often arbitrarily) created centers single-mindedly devoted to specialized endeavors like higher education, atomic or space research, or the pursuit of happiness. Others grew from religious or other idealistic motivations. Few, however, were planned in relation to other and older communities; and some, once their initial raison d'être had disappeared, collapsed as viable communities.

The New Towns that have been proposed ever since the end of World War II, and have appeared in the U.S. since about 1960, are far less haphazard than those built in this country during its more free-wheeling laissez-faire days. They were planned and built in response to the suddenly looming population explosion and its implications, to the apparent failure of

many urban renewal programs in the 1950s, and to the increasingly understood need for regional rather than just local planning. The idea was that New Towns could siphon off excess population from exploding metropolises into self-sufficient communities with their own housing, their own employment opportunities, their own educational, cultural and social facilities, and their own identities. They would not be dormitory suburbs of the nearest established metropolitan centers, but would themselves be the nuclei of new urban centers, their growth largely predetermined and limited in advance.

New Town planning in the U.S. was heavily influenced by the examples of Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries. Britain, ever since World War II, has pursued a policy of establishing brand-new communities (usually with populations between 100,000 and 250,000) outside, but not too remote from, London and other metropolitan centers. To alleviate congestion in, for example, Greater London, the national government allocated large amounts of money to New Town planning, design, land acquisition and, most important, relocation of industrial and commercial facilities in the new communities. Some of these New Towns have succeeded, and a few have already repaid the national government's original investment in full, the money for repayment coming exclusively from local taxes.

One reason the British New Towns have been successful, by and large, in economic and social terms is that the authorities had power to select certain companies, provide them with suitable land and plants, compensate them for whatever losses they might incur by moving into a given New Town—and then order them to do so. This sort of procedure would be hard for most U.S. free enterprisers to swallow, however generous the terms offered them by their government. True, American businesses accept much tougher settlements away from home whenever U.S.-owned enterprises are expropriated by hostile governments for the benefit of *their* citizens; but at home, where the beneficiaries happen to be their next-door neighbors,

they are likely to balk even at relatively favorable terms. Still, the carrot can always be made to look more compelling than the stick. In Sweden, for example, voluntary relocation of industries from old to New Towns is the rule; the government offers substantial benefits to companies willing to make the move, and few can resist the temptation.

Self-sufficiency—at least in terms of employment—is an essential ingredient in the success of a New Town. One of the many reasons for building New Towns in the first place is to reduce the exhausting, seemingly interminable trip to and from the job that is one of the curses of "Spread City." A New Town that lacks substantial local job opportunities for its inhabitants (as, for example, Reston, Virginia, did in its early stages) is really just a better-planned dormitory suburb, from which people commute to the nearest metropolitan job market.

The New Town: Pros and Cons

New Towns, when created under ideal conditions, have many advantages—or so it seems to their planners. Some of the arguments are:

- It is much easier to start from scratch than to unravel the incredibly complex fabric of an old, partially decaying city. "Starting from scratch" applies to social, economic and political conditions, transportation, utilities and so on.
- In planning a New Town, the sponsor may be able to acquire all the land the town needs to attain its planned objectives. The land so obtained is likely to be much cheaper than that laboriously assembled within, or next to, older cities.
- A New Town, on vacant land, can be built by economical assembly-line construction methods, much like a housing project on bulldozed land in the city.
- Building a New Town offers opportunities for experimenting with new technologies in construction, utilities, services and many other areas. Since there is usually no prior investment in, or commitment to, outmoded technologies, the New

Town can be a life-size laboratory for significant innovations that might not be tried elsewhere.

- Finally, building a New Town offers opportunities for experimenting with new political and administrative structures that would be difficult to introduce into communities whose governmental mechanisms have, over the years, become hopelessly ossified.

These are impressive advantages. But many planners see at least as many disadvantages in the concept of New Towns. For example:

- The infrastructure of utilities, highways and other services required by any community represents an enormously expensive initial investment; and, like the part of the iceberg that doesn't show, it is easily forgotten—until the cost estimates come in. It is infinitely more expensive to build a New Town from scratch than to build upon an existing infrastructure—even if the infrastructure needs to be greatly strengthened and enlarged.
- Establishing new centers of employment in as free and independent an economy as that of the U.S. is much more difficult than it is in a more centrally managed economy. Some New Towns in the U.S. have never become self-sufficient in terms of job opportunities.
- If the opportunity to plan on a large scale is one of the advantages inherent in the New Town concept, it is also a potential disadvantage. Planning far ahead in a society whose principal characteristic is unpredictable, constant, dramatic change is a skill not easily mastered—at least to date.
- And, finally, a cultural and social "identity"—an intangible asset possessed by almost every older, established community—is not easily created.

New Towns in Town

When it became evident, around 1970, that early, large-scale construction of New Towns in the U.S. was highly unlikely

(and, to the minds of many, not particularly desirable), many planners began to think in somewhat modified terms.

As a result of this reorientation, and of a great deal of experimentation (especially in France), the concept of "New Towns in Town" has begun to emerge. Briefly, the idea is to build large, reasonably self sufficient communities on available land within, or immediately adjacent to, existing ones. The concept differs from the American Urban Renewal disasters of the 1950s in that the New Town in Town would not be solely or even predominantly residential but would also contain commercial, educational, cultural and industrial facilities.

Unlike the conventional New Towns of Great Britain and Sweden, these communities would not require an entirely new infrastructure, would not have to become completely self-sufficient in terms of jobs and services and would not have to face a severe "identity crisis." Problems of relocation would probably be less severe, and problems of transportation—though, obviously, different in every case—might be solved within the framework of existing transit systems.

It remains to be seen whether or not these prospects will materialize. Several New Towns in Town are currently in the planning or construction stage; but they vary so fundamentally in their special problems and opportunities that it may be impossible to draw many universally applicable conclusions from present or future experience.

Still, at least one conclusion is predictable. If one of the principal purposes of New Towns was to put an end to the monstrous, uncontrolled growth of metropolitan areas, the New-Town-in-Town concept will contribute little to that endeavor. All we may hope for it to do is to create viable, more or less self-sufficient communities within the existing urban fabric. We cannot expect it to curb the metropolitan sprawl, with its attendant problems.

These problems include the growing difficulty of manufacturing goods in, and distributing them from, congested central

city areas—a factor which has driven many industries (and jobs) out of the city. No intelligent and humane planning of New Towns in Town and no amount of subsidy for them will recapture those jobs for inner-city residents. Only a national land and growth plan with real controls, closely related to similar plans in neighboring nations in such matters as transportation and energy distribution, will enable us to deal with this and other consequences of our chaotic land use—to direct and limit the present aimless urban sprawl.

Given the current political realities in this country, the prospects for the framing and implementation of such a plan are dim. As in so many other respects, the U.S. is likely to drift aimlessly almost into disaster before our people and their public servants pay serious attention to the desperate problems at hand.

What Kinds of Housing?

Throughout the 1930s and beyond, urban housing tended to mean high-rise apartments—occasionally mixed with low-rise walk-up apartments or town houses, but more often left unrelieved. The notion of "towers in a park," originally developed by such early modernists as Le Corbusier, was supposed to free the ground in densely settled areas by building "vertical cities" that would cover only a fraction of the available land and leave the rest for recreation.

That diagrammatic notion of glistening towers spaced far apart in a park turned out to be simplistic. In actual experience, high-rise apartment houses have not infrequently proved to be total disasters. Not long ago, for example, the notorious Pruitt-Igoe development in St. Louis, a complex of 33 eleven-story buildings containing 2,764 apartments, was in effect destroyed by vandalism and crime; after fruitless attempts at rehabilitation, the entire project was demolished.

Pruitt-Igoe was not nearly as bad a high-rise development as most of its contemporaries across the U.S. Among other things, the architects had created large communal outdoor spaces on every floor, on the theory that children should have such play areas directly outside their front doors. But the theory did not work out in practice; the "sidewalks and playgrounds in the sky" were turned into junkyards and ambushes.[1] And since the spaces created (or, rather, left over) between the 33 dreary

1. A Canadian architect, Oscar Newman, in a recent book entitled *Defensible Space*, has analyzed Pruitt-Igoe and other problem projects in great detail, particularly the relation between design and crime.

towers at Pruitt-Igoe were never designed to accommodate anything except fire engines, patrol cars, garbage trucks and howling gusts of wind, the children who grew up in this project were effectively barred from outdoor recreation.

High Risers: No Place to Play

Obviously, it is very difficult and costly to create high-rise apartments with the kinds of outdoor amenities, preferably at the doorstep, that are offered by, say, a well-planned row house community—amenities that seem highly desirable if not essential for families with young children. Valiant efforts in that direction have been made in recent years (notably at Riverbend, in Harlem); but the best that could be achieved within the necessarily tight cost constraints was a system of balconies or "patios in the sky," which, while generous as balconies go, were hardly big enough to hold a playpen and a couple of deck chairs. Communal outdoor space, in which children might congregate to play ball, cannot be built in such "vertical cities" except at exorbitant cost.

Yet private or public outdoor space has become increasingly necessary, for our routine indoor spaces have become increasingly cramped. Room sizes in almost all publicly assisted houses are governed by so-called minimum standards, which invariably become maximum standards, and which often seem to stem from bureaucratic bookkeeping, not rational analysis.

Thus, in many parts of the U.S., interior kitchens are the size of large closets, whether the families to be served consist of two or ten people. Living rooms do not vary substantially as family sizes vary. Children's bedrooms, though often occupied by two school-age kids, are rarely big enough to hold two beds, much less two desks or play space for two. The strait jacket is so tight that even enlightened apartment designers are forced to produce corridors in which two people cannot pass. Balconies, if any, are usually built not to provide livable private outdoor areas, but because some bureaucratic room count gives

the builder a credit for them (at half the cost of enclosed spaces) that might help him balance his books.

Outdoors, things are not much better. Even where high-rise apartments are surrounded by much open space, the parking requirements written into law in our automobile-oriented society frequently chew up so much of that space that very little is left for recreation. As for parent supervision, it is impossible except for those families who happen to live within immediate reach of the playground.

It is, of course, technically possible to build what Le Corbusier in the early 1920s called "superimposed villas." It *is* possible to construct duplex apartments with interior stairs that have the spirit, if not the form, of row houses; to build such duplex apartments with generous terraces for private outdoor living; to create public outdoor spaces on elaborate roof gardens and on intermediate floors; to equip high-rise apartment houses with built-in stores and day care centers; to provide peripheral playgrounds supervised by trained personnel; to place all necessary parking underground and top the parking garages with additional outdoor community facilities. It is possible to do all this and much more to make high risers habitable for families with young children; it has, in fact, been done, both in the U.S. and abroad. But the apartment towers so nicely endowed have either been luxury buildings, or so massively subsidized as to make them unrealistic models, given the current (and probable future) social and economic climate.

The conclusion is inescapable, and is recognized today by all but the most doctrinaire planners: High risers don't work for families with children, because there is no safe place for the children to go.

The Uses of High Risers

On the other hand, even within the limits of what is practicable here and now, high-rise apartments can work well enough for single men and women and for some childless couples. Given

certain special amenities, they can also provide comfortable homes for elderly people. Perhaps they should be thought of as belonging in the category of apartment hotels, designed for certain life styles of the old and the childless young, and endowed with amenities desired by those age groups.

However, one possible trouble with that solution is that it may spell segregation by age group. For example, there is a tendency today to build special "housing for the elderly" in high-rise blocks in the middle of nowhere. That surely isn't a very humane way of dealing with old people, nor a sensible approach to the creation of organic communities.

When older people voice a preference for buildings of their own (as a group from Boston's Bromley Heath project recently did in a Senatorial hearing), it usually is in response to the threat of crime rather than for positive reasons. Where housing is reasonably safe, the aged do not as a rule relish being filed away in elevator buildings, however well designed and equipped with social facilities, to await death. Meanwhile, young families living elsewhere, with no neighbors except other young families of almost identical income and educational background, also might and do find life in their undifferentiated communities a trifle bland. An admixture of older, retired couples, who make good baby sitters, might well benefit all generations.

Different Homes for Different Needs

What all this adds up to is that a case can be made for certain kinds of high-rise apartments, but only if they are integrated into a varied fabric of housing types. The trick is to design a mixture of dwellings that will satisfy the different kinds of people to be served: row houses or relatively low-rise structures for families with young children or teenagers, high-rise blocks for young singles and (assuming certain safety features and amenities) elderly individuals or couples. Each of these residential groupings will, of course, require special supporting

facilities—for example, day care areas, decentralized classrooms, shops, community rooms, central kitchens.

In the past, this kind of mixed development has been expensive to build. One big reason for this is that virtually all building codes in the U.S. now forbid the construction of walk-up apartments more than four stories in height, and that high-speed elevator buildings do not, generally speaking, become economical until they are at least 20 stories high. Recently, though, some ingenious solutions have been found to overcome this dilemma. Architects have connected high-rise elevator buildings to medium-rise buildings without elevators by means of enclosed bridges at various levels, in effect providing elevator service for the upper floors of six- and eight-story walk-ups. Thus the medium-rise building, which can probably be designed to serve families with older children reasonably well, has been made economically feasible.

The population densities possible under such a mixed plan are higher than one might think. It has been demonstrated, both in the U.S. and in Europe, that as many as 50 units per acre can be accommodated without resorting to uniformly high-rise housing; high-rise projects without any low-rise components become unavoidable only when that rate is exceeded.

In another way, too, 50 units per acre has been found to represent some sort of critical mass. Below it, communities can generally cope with problems of crime; above it, things get progressively worse. Pruitt-Igoe, with a density of precisely 50 units per acre, was a borderline case. If it had been planned as a low-rise community of compact row houses or walk-up apartments, with manageable outdoor space at everybody's doorstep, the story might have turned out differently.

All in a Row

Of the housing prototypes that might serve as alternatives to the high riser, one of the oldest is the row house. Its contemporary American incarnation is likely to contain, on the ground

floor, a kitchen-dining-family area, probably facing the street, and a living area facing a court to the rear. The street approach may contain a service yard and a parking space. The second floor may consist of three or four bedrooms and one or two baths. In narrower row houses, there may be a third floor with added bedrooms. The entire "package"—separated from its neighbors by masonry walls—may occupy a lot about 20 feet wide and 80 feet deep, or 1,600 square feet. For comparison, a free-standing suburban house with comparable interior space may occupy a property of 12,000 square feet!

Our hypothetical row house will have a walled patio of 400 square feet; in all, it will have only 800 square feet of outdoor space which the owners will have to maintain—as opposed to about 10,000 unmanageable square feet for our suburban home owner. The construction cost will be much lower, because service roads and utility lines will be much shorter, and the consumption of heating fuel will be less year after year, because there are only two exposed walls instead of four. In other ways, too, row house communities could save energy (as well as, in some cases, expensive equipment): through joint facilities like communal freezers, kitchens or washers, and through public transportation, which is feasible in suburbs where the population is dense enough. On top of it all, because the dwelling units are tightly concentrated, much of the remaining natural or historic environment can remain untouched.

Even in urban situations, our typical row house looks convincing. In such a setting, the house probably would extend to the property line along the street—in other words, there would be no yard or parking space in front. A row house, complete with private walled backyard, could thus be built on 1,200 square feet. That translates into more than 200 people per acre—a high density level, arrived at on a rather small-town, almost neighborly scale.

By mixing such one-family row houses with high-rise apartments, the population per acre could, if necessary, be doubled—

though this sort of density is not always desirable. Still, such a distribution of private and public space would produce a communal pattern very different from that encountered in most suburban or low-density urban communities.

Specifically, a cluster of 100 row houses on 1,600 square feet each could free around 20 acres of public space for parks and playgrounds, as compared with the same number of free-standing houses on suburban-size lots. In an urban context, too, row house clusters, if mixed with walk-up apartments, can leave room for significant public outdoor areas—most of them within range of doorstep supervision—at no added land development cost. A low-rise mix of this sort can accommodate up to 50 units per acre.

Even if generous row house development should seem uneconomical, the very tightness or neighborliness of this sort of configuration is clearly preferable to the alienation bred by tall apartment towers spaced far apart—or the similar alienation fostered by little ranch houses set at a distance from neighboring little ranch houses.

One reason the best cities of the Western world—such as London—are as good as they are is that they are largely made up of standard row houses grouped around public parks. London's singular quality has been reinforced wherever the Greater London Council has retained the traditional fabric and constructed new housing that emulated the patterns of Eaton Square and Bloomsbury; it has been destroyed where the fabric was ripped apart in pursuit of some abstract notion of "towers in a park."

Virtues of the Walk-up

Halfway between the modern architect's high-rise Valhalla and the pedestrian planner's conventional, though updated, town house stands a perfectly acceptable housing type that is neither house nor high-rise: the walk-up apartment building, usually limited to four stories in height. Walk-up apartments

have certain advantages over row houses (especially where higher densities must be achieved) and can easily be combined with the latter: The two lower floors can be designed as row houses, with the two upper floors containing apartments.

The economics of such arrangements frequently depends upon local building codes, some of which require different fire ratings for single, double and multiple occupancy housing. Many variations in the design of walk-up apartments (with or without row house components) have been attempted, especially in Europe; some of these have even succeeded in providing the upper floor apartments with viable private outdoor spaces. The reason such amenities can be provided with relative ease and at relatively low cost in a low-rise building, but only with great difficulty in a high-rise, is almost entirely structural: It is not too complicated to stagger and offset floors in a building supported on light steel or masonry walls or even wooden studs and joists, nor to align plumbing stacks vertically in a low building; but it is very difficult and costly to do these things in a tower.

Suburbia's Flawed Dream

Implied in much of the above is that America's conventional suburban development is about the most inefficient—and in many ways the least desirable—community plan yet devised.

The reasons are almost endless. A community of individual houses on relatively small individual lots chews up land at a phenomenal rate; in doing this, it stretches out expensive roads and utility lines to the point where the cost of land "improvement" may easily add 25 per cent to the unit cost of a one-family house. This sort of planning, familiar to all of us, places a huge burden upon individual home owners. Stretched-out roads and services also represent a continuing burden on the community in terms of taxes, since police, fire and sanitation departments find demands on their human and mechanical resources constantly extended.

Again, home owners have to keep up properties too big to maintain by hand and too small to maintain economically by machine; too large to provide intimate outdoor space, yet too small for active recreation. There is usually no communal outdoor space (which could be maintained at much lower cost per square foot than the home owner's unmanageable backyard). And so the kids play in the street.

Finally, this sort of cookie-cutter development destroys the natural environment without substituting a new, desirable organism—a tightly knit community of the sort that has formed the nucleus of towns in the past.

Admittedly, Americans today seem to be satisfied with suburbia despite all these defects. They like their cookie-cutter houses, and they love their automobiles. As the sociologist Nathan Glazer pointed out some time ago, what an urban critic wants is not necessarily what the people want. "When they have choices," Glazer said, "they create Los Angeles."

One answer may be that, for all its appeal, suburbanization and the attendant motorization with its waste of energy may get out of hand to the point where, willy-nilly, they have to be curbed for the sake of the common good. As we now realize, we cannot go on expending energy the way a drunken sailor spends his money, and so we may have no other choice. But another, less bleak answer is that the possibilities people may accept in the future are not confined to what they can visualize in the present.

The man in the street will not do the designer's work for him; when asked to state what kind of home he likes, he will choose among things that already exist, and on that scale the suburban house looks best to him—now. But some of the people who "created Los Angeles" when they had a choice (or when they thought they had one, for the decision was often dictated by social or economic circumstances) seem to be having second thoughts. The increasing cost of suburban services, the increasingly evident waste of human energy (as well as fuel)

through interminable commuting, the stresses of suburban isolation—all these are beginning to tell. Suburbia, created after World War II for and by young families with small children, has become middle-aged, and some of its early charm has begun to pall. If and when urban designers come up with a viable form of housing that is less wasteful and also is convenient, safe and humane, the man in the street may well change his mind.

A Technological Breakthrough?

Much has been said and written about radical technological changes that might help solve the housing crisis in the U.S. Unfortunately, such breakthroughs are not likely to affect the housing economy for some time to come—in fact, not until the shortage of building labor becomes desperate and the cost of building materials rises out of sight.

For the present and the foreseeable future, housing in the U.S. will be built most economically by just about the same skills that have built it over the past 50 years, and of just about the same materials. The skills, generally speaking, have deteriorated; the materials, generally speaking, have improved. But there has been no significant breakthrough in building that was not almost immediately wiped out by increasing costs in materials and labor. Although building unions here and there are now accepting semiskilled labor (as in the HUD-sponsored Operation Breakthrough), so far this is only a modest beginning. For the time being, the only way in which initial building costs have been, or could be, significantly reduced is still through subsidies: for land acquisition, money acquisition—and for building maintenance.

Still, there are two areas of real or imagined technological breakthrough that deserve discussion, mostly because they have attracted so much attention. The first, much in the public mind of late, is what has come to be known as systems building; the second is mobile homes.

Systems building is, quite simply, a new word for prefabrication; and changing the name of the game does not change its rules. No intelligent architect, engineer, planner or housing enthusiast is opposed to prefabrication. Indeed, many of the components that make up our buildings today are prefabricated and have long been. But not until there is a very considerable change in the climate of the American building industry will prefabrication become the panacea some of us hope it will be.

Prefabrication: A Long Shot

Almost by definition, prefabrication offers economies only when it is coupled with mass production. Prefabricating small volumes of service cores, or even of entire apartments, would be about as economical as prefabricating Rolls Royces. But volume production works only if there is volume distribution; and at present the kind of mass distribution system that keeps Detroit humming is unknown in the building industry.

In fact, it is almost inconceivable there—for two reasons. First, the U.S. is a large country with many different (often justifiably different) building codes, and it is very difficult to design a prefabricated product that will meet an almost infinite variety of such codes. (Just imagine what would happen to General Motors if each American community had its own performance standards for automobiles!) Second, mass distribution of large prefabricated components is clearly uneconomical in a country with such enormous distances. It is estimated that the rather modest house prefabricating industry in the U.S. cannot compete in terms of price with local, on-site labor beyond a radius of about 100 miles from the particular plant location.

Prefabrication, in the U.S. and elsewhere, has often failed to analyze its own problems and opportunities. In most housing—whether single-family homes or high-rise apartments—the shell of the building accounts only for about 20 per cent of the total

cost, so that a 10 or 20 per cent reduction in the cost of the shell alone produces an almost infinitesimal reduction in the overall cost of the building. (This is one reason, incidentally, why all those wonderfully idealistic people who think the U.S. housing crisis can be solved with geodesic domes or inflatable bubbles seem slightly soft in the head to the rest of us—who may be just as idealistic . . .)

What this means is that prefabrication is most urgently needed in those components of housing where the hard core of high cost is found: in plumbing, wiring, heating, air-conditioning and related installations. These components actually account for two or three times the cost of the shell; and it is here that building codes and certain building trades have wiped out whatever savings prefabrication might have achieved. In one recent instance, admittedly an extreme one, a visionary manufacturer of prefabricated bathroom-kitchen-utility-room packages found that his extraordinarily well-engineered units were left standing on the sidewalk of a new development for many months, because the unions that had to make the necessary plumbing and wiring connections refused to do so. In the end, the matter was settled by dismantling the packages on the sidewalk, carrying them piecemeal into the apartments that awaited them and then painstakingly reassembling them with on-site labor! (The manufacturer thereupon gave up on prefabrication.)

So prefabrication and mass distribution of the high-cost elements that really determine the price of housing await agreement from powerful and shortsighted unions—as well as from building-code writers, whose differing and often antiquated standards can be an equally large obstacle.

Finally, prefabrication of major, inherently expensive building components cannot be successful until there is some general agreement, nationwide, on dimensional and performance standards to govern building codes. Yet building research—research for the second largest industry in the U.S.—is virtually

nonexistent! What passes for such among some of our major manufacturers of building products is little more than market analysis, designed to identify what products—say, wood-grain plastic laminates, or aluminum shingles—might most profitably titillate the consumer. There has been virtually no effort in the incredibly fragmented American building industry to agree on any standards governing anything. The last time the industry subscribed to a common dimensional standard was when it accepted the 8-inch-long brick, centuries ago, as a kind of module—and this module still governs much of today's production of building components.

Prefabrication vs. Other Economies

Systems building—or prefabrication—has two principal advantages. First, it reduces the hours of on-site labor. Second, it cuts down the consumption of certain expensive building materials. Under controlled factory conditions, the use of such materials can be pared down to close tolerances, whereas on site, materials are often used wastefully, because conditions (difficult weather, for one) make for sloppy assemblage.

In Europe, where much building prefabrication was pioneered, material has frequently been expensive, and labor cheap. The incentive for prefabrication has been, therefore, to save aluminum, steel, concrete, wood, and so on. But in the U.S., where materials have always been lavishly used, and where the cost of labor has been traditionally high, the incentive is to save time on site.

This difference has sometimes created confusion when European systems have been used here, or American construction-management techniques applied in Europe. In the U.S., it may not make sense to set up fixed plants for mass-producing beautifully engineered components when these components still have to be shipped to distant markets where the climate and the building codes may be quite different; it may be much more reasonable to create controlled conditions on site.

There now are ways of making on-site construction simple and efficient in any weather, all year round. Not long ago in upstate New York, where the climate ranges from bad to terrible, a large factory was constructed on a site temporarily roofed over with a huge air-supported vinyl bubble. Although conventional materials were used, the unit cost proved remarkably low. The reason was, of course, that the contractor had addressed himself to the real problem of construction in the U.S.: how to improve productivity on site—not how to reduce the thickness of a factory-produced wall panel by a couple of millimeters.

Some of the problems encountered by systems builders have been faced realistically. For example, to eliminate the high cost of "shipping air," i.e., transporting an empty shell from a prefabricating plant to a distant site, attempts have been made to make plants mobile—to set them up on the very sites they are intended to supply. The Levitt organization pioneered the concept of the mobile plant rolling across the wasteland in orchestrated sequence and plunking down neatly finished houses the way a cartoon hen plunks down her eggs. In a country as huge as ours, the mobile prefab plant may turn out to be the most reasonable solution.

Yet, curiously enough, though the Levitts probably contributed more to prefabrication practice than all American theoreticians combined, it wasn't their mobile prefab plant that reduced the unit cost of their standard house to something almost unbelievable in today's terms. What really enabled the Levitt organization—and others like it—to build such incredibly cheap and good housing (forget, for the moment, the socio-economic drawbacks) was smart financial management. There is no question that much, much more money was saved by the Levitts, and for their customers, through mass purchasing and shrewd interim financing maneuvers than by explorations of advanced technology. Judging by their example, breakthroughs in housing, at least in the immediate future, are not

to be found in technological gimmickry but in deft management of housing dollars.

It may be appropriate to refer, at this point, to Habitat, the 158-unit development built in Montreal for Expo '67. This extraordinary cluster of precast concrete boxes piled some 12 stories high—designed by a young Israeli architect, Moshe Safdie—has received all the acclaim due to an imaginative and daring experiment. However, like many experiments in the arts and sciences, Habitat demonstrated mainly what should *not* be done in the future. Because the boxes supported one another, the cumulative weight of the concrete and the strength required of it were as monumental as the structure itself; because what was being prefabricated was shells, not services, the unit cost was similarly monumental—and unlikely to be reduced in larger-scale mass production. Habitat did, however, point to another, promising area of possible breakthrough: the technology prefigured by today's trailer or "mobile home."

Trailer Technology

In some ways the mobile home, as presently known, offers the best promise of relatively inexpensive, well-designed, well-manufactured and well-distributed housing in this country for the present and the immediate future.

In fact, mobile homes already account for a phenomenal percentage of total housing production. Out of 2.3 million housing units produced in the U.S. in 1971, 485,000 were mobile homes—and the proportion has hovered around the 20 per cent mark for some time. That is an impressive statistic for an industry no serious housing expert even recognized until a few years ago.

So amazing has been the growth of the mobile-home industry that some of its newly won admirers have made certain highly misleading claims for it. The typical mobile home, as presently constituted, is *not* "the building brick of the 20th

century," as one architect put it recently (implying that the solution to high-rise housing was to stack up mobile homes to dizzying heights, plugging them into some sort of vertical service core and turning each unit, in effect, into a one-family apartment). If mobile-home-type boxes were reengineered to meet the minimum standards of performance and safety expected in high-rise (or even low-rise) construction, their cost would be similar to that of conventionally built housing. Indeed, this has proved to be the case in several recent experiments, in which mobile-home techniques were adapted to permanent, more conventional buildings.

In its present form, the mobile home is, and pretends to be, nothing more than a prefabricated housing package that lends itself to single-family occupancy in "trailer parks"—partly because such developments, besides often being deplorable in other ways, are virtually without building codes. In this role, as an inexpensive one-story container strong enough to last slightly longer than the time-payment schedule, it fills a real need. However, cost comparisons between mobile homes and conventional housing are not very revealing, since the cost of land and the expensive improvements it usually requires are rarely transferable to the mobile home side of the ledger. As for the suggestion that mobile homes, as presently constituted, could meet high-rise fire codes or structural or mechanical requirements, it will persuade no one even faintly knowledgeable in the building industry.

Adapting the Trailer Principle

Still, the mobile home—if fundamentally redesigned—could contribute significantly to technological advance in housing. Manufacturing boxes, the year round, under controlled factory conditions, largely with semiskilled labor drawn from industrial rather than building trade unions, is sure to permit tighter cost and quality control. And the boxes thus mass-produced, with all interior utilities and finishes installed, will certainly be

a much more efficient (and possibly a more economical) product than the equivalent kind of unit put together on site, under difficult working conditions and with the poor coordination usually encountered there.

Again, distributing these large boxes by simply putting them on wheels (or suspending them from helicopters) and thus shipping them from factory to site in one or two pieces clearly makes sense, even though it does mean shipping a great deal of air. The largest boxes presently permitted on most highways are 12 feet wide, 60 feet long, and 8 or more feet high. Two of these, when bolted together, will make a 1,440-square-foot suburban home, and frequently do! Such a home may have three bedrooms, 1½ baths and a built-in kitchen. Prefabricated attachments now being manufactured by the industry—for example, screened porches—can substantially enlarge the usable space of such a dwelling.

Finally, assembling the boxes once they arrive on site is greatly facilitated by the dimensional precision with which the units can be manufactured in a plant, and by the increasingly powerful hoisting equipment now available to builders.

In other words, the principles followed today by mobile-home manufacturers are admirably advanced, even if the ultimate product is usually (not at all necessarily) hideous. And however these principles might have to be modified in applying them to permanent housing, there is one sure saving: time. In an era that desperately needs mass-produced housing, that consideration alone may put mobile home industry methods among the important solutions.

What Kinds of Subsidies?

Many areas of American life are directly or indirectly subsidized by government. Most of the subsidies are designed to stimulate investment or industrial production or both. Most of them tend to benefit people who are reasonably well-to-do or even affluent; a few benefit those who are neither.

Many Americans believe that housing subsidies from up high are designed primarily to aid low-income inner-city residents, most of whom (it would seem) are members of certain racial or ethnic minorities. Subsidies are also blamed for the construction of mammoth clusters of drab concrete-and-brick towers, located in the midst of inner-city slums and infested with all the standard inner-city ills: neglect, vandalism, social disorganization, crime, and poverty itself.

Although such projects are, unfortunately, the most visible evidence of public subsidies to housing, they constitute only a tiny fraction of today's subsidized homes in the United States. Most housing subsidies until quite recently tended largely to benefit middle-income and upper-income families living in suburbs or in affluent sections of our towns and cities. Probably the most effective kind so far has been F.H.A. mortgage insurance, in effect since 1934, and responsible for the construction of tens of millions of single-family homes and apartments since that time. This subsidy has not only benefitted millions of American families by enabling them to buy or rent homes they would not have gotten otherwise, but has also made building the second largest industry in the land, after automobiles.

Types of Subsidies to Date

Mortgage insurance is only one way of subsidizing housing. Here are some other indirect ways, and some direct ones, that have been used in the U.S.

1. *Tax deductibility of mortgage interest payments.* To suburbanites paying off their (Federally insured) mortgages, it is, or should be, a startling fact that the income tax deduction they can take for mortgage interest payments is, in effect, the largest single housing subsidy program in the U.S.! The benefits this provision of the tax law affords to home owners (a far larger number of persons, it is true, than public housing residents) are *more than ten times greater* than those provided by public housing, the next largest subsidy program. It is not exactly surprising, therefore, that when the Nixon Administration—returned to office in 1972 with the overwhelming help of suburbanites—froze most subsidized housing programs in January 1973, it specifically exempted this largest housing subsidy from the cutback.

The tax deduction subsidy is a bonanza of staggering proportions: In 1966 the sums deducted amounted to about $7 billion, in 1970 to $10 billion. And most of the benefit went to the reasonably affluent: 36 per cent of the families that benefitted had incomes over $15,000 per year, and those with incomes over $50,000 per year received benefits almost as great as *all* expenditures under *all* our public housing programs. It has not been a bad subsidy for the well-to-do. As for those whose annual family incomes came to less than $5,000, they accounted for a mere 8 per cent of the beneficiaries of the tax-deductibility clause!

2. *Federally supported public housing.* The Federal Government makes grants to municipalities, which then build, own and operate low-rent housing for tenants whose incomes fall within fixed upper and lower limits. Municipalities participating in these public housing programs can proceed in several ways: They can hire their own architects and contractors, and

do their own building; they can sign a contract with a private developer and purchase the completed buildings outright (which is known as a "turnkey" operation); or—under a fairly recent program—they can lease existing housing units and then, in effect, sublet them to qualified applicants.

In July 1972, just over 1 million units of public housing were available in the United States. That number was sufficient to accommodate only about 10 per cent of all people officially classified as "poor." Thus, the program was modest even before the Nixon Administration put it on the shelf in 1973. (As for who is considered poor in the U.S. nowadays, the Government currently sets the poverty threshold at an annual income of $4,275 for a nonfarm family of four. In 1966, more than 80 per cent of the occupants of public housing had incomes of less than $5,000 a year, and more than half earned under $3,000.)

3. *Home-ownership and rental-assistance programs.* Under Sections 235 and 236 of the 1968 Housing Act, subsidies are provided for interest payments on mortgage loans, often reducing the rate of interest to a mere 1 per cent a year—as opposed to the 9.5 per cent charged on the open mortgage market around 1973. Section 235 directly saves money for home owners; Section 236 indirectly benefits tenants, to whom the saving is passed on by the landlord. The latter subsidy can easily halve apartment rentals, and it has done just that.

Under the home-ownership program (Section 235), borrowers must set aside at least 20 per cent of their incomes every month for payments on principal, interest, taxes and insurance on their homes; HUD pays whatever additional amount is needed to amortize the mortgage. Under the rental-assistance program (Section 236), tenants pay at least 25 per cent of their incomes toward rent; HUD makes up the difference between the amount paid by the renter and the "fair market rental."

Although no conclusive evidence is available, it seems that most home owners benefitting from Section 235 assistance

have incomes between $4,000 and $7,000 a year; most tenants aided by Section 236 have slightly lower incomes, ranging from $3,000 to $7,000 a year. (The difference may be offset by the fact that home owners tend to have larger families.) Very low-income households cannot afford housing under Section 235 or 236 programs, unless they also qualify for rent supplement assistance. A good many do, and up to 20 per cent of the units in any Section 236 project may be occupied by tenants who also receive rent supplements.

4. *Rent supplements.* Under this form of assistance—enacted in 1965, after a great deal of experimentation on a small scale—HUD is authorized to make payments on behalf of certain low-income tenants living in privately financed buildings owned by nonprofit or limited-dividend corporations or cooperatives. To qualify, tenants must pay at least one-fourth of their incomes toward rent. Supplemental payments under this program have amounted to about two-thirds of the market rent for the units concerned.

In 1970, the rent supplement program resulted in payments of around $21 million. By 1972, the amount reached about $91 million, which is, of course, a substantial amount. The program was not, initially, meant to reach such proportions. The original intent was to assist those whose incomes were too high for public housing, but too low for adequate private housing at rents they could afford. However, by the time the program was enacted, the payments had become a supplement to public housing: Those who now qualify for rent supplements fall into the same income bracket as those who qualify for public housing.

Many experts believe that rent supplements of a much broader sort are the most desirable form of housing subsidy in a free-enterprise society. The advantages of such programs, in practical as well as social terms, will be discussed below.

5. *Low-interest mortgages for nonprofit housing.* This program, known as "221(d)3," was designed to assist low- and

middle-income families. Although it was, in effect, phased out by early 1973, some of its features are still worth recording.

Principally, the program reduced interest rates on mortgages for nonprofit or limited-dividend housing corporations to 3 per cent. At the beginning of 1973, market rates for mortgages had risen close to 9.5 per cent, and the subsidy produced a saving, in rents to tenants, of about 37 per cent over conventionally financed housing! Furthermore, up to 40 per cent of the tenants in a 221(d)3 project could be recipients of rent supplements as well.

Most of the beneficiaries under the program turned out to be middle-income families; more than half of the benefits (which totaled $28 million in 1970) accrued to Whites, while Blacks and other racial minorities received about two-fifths. By the end of 1972, some 131,000 units had been constructed under this particular program. In effect, Section 221(d)3 was designed to do for middle-income families what Section 236 was designed to do for low-income households.

6. *Farmers' Home Administration programs.* Between 1967 and 1972, the Farmers' Home Administration provided more than $4.5 *billion* in loans and grants for purchase, rehabilitation and construction of homes. The Farmers' Home programs provide direct, insured loans to people living in areas under the agency's jurisdiction who cannot obtain loans at "reasonable" rates through private institutions. Most benefits seem to go to households with moderate annual incomes; very few below that level benefit. The majority of properties affected is located in small towns, or in the open country; but, curiously, few actual farms have been covered by this program.

A Different Approach?

These, then, are the principal devices employed in recent years to subsidize housing in the U.S. The pattern that emerges from this summary of programs and benefits is one of more direct and more substantial assistance to upper- and middle-

income households than to low- and low-middle-income families. This is so despite the fact that, according to Henry Aaron, the author of *Shelter and Subsidies: Who Benefits From Federal Housing Policies?* (Brookings Institution, 1972), "bad housing is not primarily an affliction of the well-to-do." Continuing less sarcastically, Aaron points out that "all housing programs intended for low- and lower-middle-income households provide large amounts of help to a small fraction of eligible households, and no direct help at all to all the rest."

There are some things that are good about the seemingly improvised assortment of housing programs listed above, and some that are deplorable. One of the latter is that all Federal subsidies are linked to kinds of *housing*, rather than kinds of *households*. That means families assisted under one or another of these programs risk losing their benefits if they move, for whatever reason.

Many experts, including those in the Nixon Administration, have, therefore, become convinced that some very broad form of rent subsidy would be a more intelligent solution to our varied housing problems than the present technique of heavily subsidizing specific housing in specific places for specific people. The reasoning goes something like this:

First, experience has shown that the private sector is much more efficient at producing housing (at any level of cost) than the public sector. In 1972, a comparative study of building costs in public and private construction, released by the New York State Council on Architecture, claimed that buildings constructed by New York State agencies took two or three times as long to see the light of day as did equivalent buildings produced by private enterprise. (There was no attempt to evaluate or compare architectural quality; but "architectural quality" has not always been a characteristic of public edifices.) Construction time is, of course, a major component of construction cost; and so it seems likely that privately constructed housing could easily compete with its public counterpart.

Second, experience has also shown that huge, highly visible blockbuster-type housing projects dropped into the midst of established, homogeneous, small-scale neighborhoods create not only intolerable visual clashes, but also intolerable social tensions—whether they are public housing towers in inner cities or private housing in solidly middle-class communities. Not quite so visible and offensive are low-rise "developments" built for a single income or age group; still, even these do not make for an organic social mix. In a pluralistic society, it does not seem particularly desirable to create ghettos consisting solely of families visibly tagged by race, color, creed, age or annual income—even though, if people wish to congregate in such clusters, rent subsidies will not stop them.

And third, experience has shown that mobility in housing is as essential to freedom of choice (of employment, for example) as is the mobility afforded by widely available transportation systems. One of the most frightening aspects of life in the Soviet Union is the existence of "internal passports"—special travel documents Soviet citizens must acquire to move from one part of their country to the next. Unhappily, those of our citizens who are trapped in inner-city ghettos are immobilized in a manner not at all dissimilar. Though they move around a lot—indeed more often than the well-to-do—they usually cannot escape the slums.

Passports to Mobility

In the view of many experts, families that require housing assistance should be supplied with "tickets" that will offer them reasonable housing mobility—vouchers that could be cashed in by any landlord to make up the difference between what the ticket holder can afford to pay for housing and the cost of decent, appropriate housing in a given place.

Such answers have been considered for many years. Marie C. McGuire, who was Commissioner of the U.S. Public Housing Administration under Kennedy and Johnson, formulated many

of them. The difficulty has been that Congress, dominated by certain biases, has never been very happy about providing the poor—which in big cities usually means Blacks, Puerto Ricans and other racial minorities—with easy access to Middle America. Yet the savings, not only in human costs, but in such economic ones as, for example, expenditures for mass transit, could prove convincing before long.

When the Nixon Administration proposed its own, rather unsatisfactory, version of the housing subsidy idea, in January 1973, it suggested that many of the housing programs to date had failed to produce anything of much value. That was a gross exaggeration. Some clearly had been productive, and remedial therapy might have been a more rational approach than the wholesale executions that were carried out. Still, it is a fact that a good many of the projects created across the U.S. over the past four decades fell short of what they might have been, and that some of them were invitations to disaster.

Compared with the growing number of Swedish "service houses"—housing communities that contain, among other things, day care centers, markets and communal kitchens, and are designed in response to the realities of contemporary life, rather than to some bureaucrat's peculiar notions of how people ought to live—many U.S. housing projects have been dismal. They have largely failed to reflect new conditions and new requirements, such as the need for day care centers created by the increase in the number of working mothers, for decentralization of schools, and for the creation of job opportunities within a given project. In fact, most of our housing projects today are based upon out-of-date, though well-intentioned, schemes drawn up during the Depression, when few such problems and opportunities were present in our cities.

A reasonably free ticket to housing mobility might fix a good part of that. But it will do so only if the particular region has an adequate supply of good housing. The principal flaw of the Nixon Administration's somewhat naive proposal for rent and

home-purchase subsidies is that it will work only if privately constructed housing is available in a given area and in quantity. Too often it isn't.

A More Humane Architecture

Although the high-rise public housing ghettos so visible on the skylines of our cities have attracted much justified criticism, there has been noticeable improvement in the design quality of subsidized housing over the past half dozen years. It is no longer unusual for a public housing project to show an interesting and attractive mixture of low-, medium- and high-rise units; to include day care facilities and even nursery schools, kindergartens and schools; to be imaginatively landscaped; and to boast playgrounds designed for children, rather than for the benefit of asphalt-oriented maintenance crews.

Some of this has been the result of private initiatives—foundations willing to support experimental programs, or tenants' organizations and community groups involving themselves in the planning, design or rehabilitation of project areas. Also, while public housing projects are the responsibility of the municipalities in which they stand, HUD has recently applied a certain amount of pressure to influence such matters as site selection and the modernization of older projects. HUD now insists that projects for which modernization grants are sought must have an actively involved tenants' organization, with authority to formulate modernization programs. Without that, HUD will not give its assistance. It would be even better if HUD also required facilities for health care, child care and other social services essential for the success of the project.

Despite the recent advances in the architectural quality of public housing, much opposition is still motivated by the grim image of yesteryear's "project." All over the country, public housing has been delayed or blocked by neighborhood groups determined to carry their fight through all the available courts in the land. In Cleveland, New York, Newark and elsewhere,

predominantly White neighborhoods have fiercely resisted the intrusion of what they expected to be predominantly Black public housing projects. And although the courts have rarely, if ever, upheld such neighborhood protests, the neighborhoods have often been entirely right in their opposition—though perhaps for the wrong reasons.

They have been right because the bulldozer/blockbuster approach to housing is fundamentally inimical to the nature of cities. It is also, indirectly, inimical to the nature of family life. Of course it is true that large projects have always contained some families with pathologies that cannot be corrected, no matter what services are offered to them, and that such families have at times disrupted life in the project. But this problem tends to be magnified in public discussion; after all, many projects do work perfectly well. Moreover, middle-income families also have their share of problems—only theirs are not so glaringly evident, and effective help is more readily available to them.

Still, the grim image of yesteryear's "project" does haunt us, as it should. The city has often been compared with a natural organism; and although the analogy does not hold in all respects, it is sufficiently valid to suggest some basic guidelines to urban renewal and rehabilitation.

Preserving the Urban Fabric

As explained earlier, enlightened urban designers know that it is important to preserve as much of the urban fabric as possible, and thus to create a certain neighborhood continuity. This means that rehabilitating run-down buildings is often preferable to razing entire blocks of them; that retaining significant community assets—from corner candy stores to churches—is often better than building blockbusters that wipe out the good with the bad.

Although these insights have gained wide acceptance since Jane Jacobs wrote her extraordinary book, *The Death and Life*

of Great American Cities (published in 1961), rehabilitation still is considered much less economical than rebuilding, because of the greater efficiency of large-scale building operations. In reality, though, the economics of inner-city housing are affected by many factors besides large-scale efficiency.

For example, infill housing, whether it consists of rehabilitation or of small-scale new elements grafted into the urban organism, can often be handled by small, usually disadvantaged building contractors, who thus are enabled to contribute to the economic health of their communities—a significant plus, even if hard to evaluate. Again, by maintaining the character and coherence of an established neighborhood, infill housing may prevent catastrophes in which housing funds go up in smoke, as happened at Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis when that superblock project had to be destroyed. Finally, infill housing, of whatever kind, is likely to forestall the sort of confrontation, costly in terms of money, time and common decency, that has recently upset so many communities from coast to coast.

It may well be that housing of this sort is best financed not by mammoth programs attuned to buildings but through (possibly more economical) programs addressed to people, offering housing coupons to those who qualify for a supplemental allowance. Such physical redistribution of America's poorer families, together with a serious reevaluation of real estate taxation (which now penalizes a landlord if he rehabilitates his property and rewards him if he lets it become a slum), may conceivably do more to renew housing and related facilities in our inner cities than was ever accomplished by massive Urban Renewal, massive Breakthroughs, and not-quite-so massive Public Housing.

A Second Chance

Imagining an "ideal American community" is easy. Translating it from idealistic theory into fact is something else again.

An ideal community would contain a perfect balance of races, colors, creeds, levels of income, cultural interests and job opportunities. It would be planned for people rather than automobiles; it would contain a variety of housing, attuned to a variety of inhabitants. Its land-use pattern would be richly mixed, with houses and apartments next to offices, factories, shops, schools and other communal facilities. Its built-up areas would be properly broken up by green belts; its transportation system would favor pedestrians and users of mass transit.

In short, one could rather easily draw a diagram of the ideal American community; and, depending upon the talents of the draftsmen, the results might range from the reasonable to the beguiling.

Unfortunately, unless we are willing to replace our metropolitan areas with New Towns, such communities are not likely to see the light of day. Too much has been invested in services, highways, transportation facilities, industries, jobs and communications to permit us to abandon what we have and start from scratch. And anyway, many people might find a community without any roots in the past less than ideal. The realistic fact of life in America is that we have no choice but to reconstruct and regenerate the urban regions which, for better or worse, have been built up over the past century and more.

Some of this reconstruction and regeneration is likely to come from within. For example, "urban homesteading" efforts

are already being made in several cities, under programs which encourage people to take over and rehabilitate abandoned housing. Other moves will have to be initiated at the Federal level, through such means as national land-bank policies designed to shape the growth of urban areas with more intelligence than has been applied to it in the past.

Decay . . . and Opportunity

The physical debris and human disorganization that remain from the recent decay of American communities seem almost beyond retrieving. Our metropolitan areas have gone through the Depression of the 1930s and the Second Civil War of the 1960s. We are left with a growing cancer of slums, flight of Whites and of jobs to the periphery, loss of political clout at the center, and violent confrontation as a way of life. These are hardly the ingredients of the ideal American community of tomorrow.

Yet there are some major potential assets inherent in this very decay.

The most obvious is the availability of land at the center. In a city that has a strong historic tradition and a strong fabric (like Florence, for example), it is virtually impossible to build significant quantities of new housing except by adding on at the perimeter, and that may create all sorts of new problems: erasure of open space, overextension of transportation arteries, commercial competition with downtown, to mention only three. But in a typical American community, where erosion gnaws at the center, and where there may be only a few urban traditions or historical relics worth maintaining, open land can be created in the very heart of things. And so there are real opportunities for organic self-renewal from inside: infill housing and New Towns in Town.

A second major asset inherent in our seemingly disintegrating urban regions is that of pluralism and diversity, in keeping with the traditions of America as a whole. In our heterogene-

ous society, neighborhood identities tend to survive, no matter how vast the urban sprawl. Today, neighborhood forces are being harnessed increasingly to positive undertakings: advocacy planning, community involvement, local planning boards, and so on. True, a good many of these manifestations have been unproductive up to now ("advocacy planning is when everybody gets into the act and then nothing happens," as one critic put it recently), and some have been motivated by prejudice of the worst kind. But if prejudices are indeed governing forces in our society, it may be just as well to bring them out into the open. Meanwhile, at their best, manifestations of neighborhood identity certainly are a tool of great potential value and wide applicability.

The emergence of often militant neighborhood power suggests that the entire urban decision-making process may have to be reexamined. Plans handed down ready-made from the upper reaches of government to the populace are unlikely to be accepted hereafter in any but times of severe national emergency, if then. Although sophisticated urban design and urban planning decisions obviously cannot be left to the layman alone, and although major planning efforts, especially those involving national land policies, will have to be made at the highest levels of government, even these may never again be made in America without significant contributions from local community groups.

In some respects, the two-tier concept of government represents a move in that direction. Under this system, functions are assigned to local or to regional agencies, depending on which makes better sense in each case. Thus, in the Indianapolis region, where the two-tier idea is being applied with considerable success, such overall functions as public safety, transportation and environmental protection are taken care of by single county-wide departments; functions in which the needs and wishes of individual communities differ—such as schools and libraries—are provided by the individual cities or villages.

The two-tier system is also working well in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

Downtown Is Not Dead

A third opportunity inherent in the present decay is the very obviousness of the need for a new start in the central cities. In recent years, it has sometimes seemed as if Americans were about ready to give up on the city center as the place where things happen; yet even if electronic communications, combined with super-rapid transportation systems, could make it technically possible to do without our center cities, the public probably would think twice about it. Without midtown Manhattan, downtown Chicago, downtown Atlanta, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Detroit, St. Louis, Denver, Boston and so on, the nation would lose most of its present vitality in economic as well as cultural terms. The U.S., thus deprived, would become an inconceivable country.

Even though the recent trend, as suggested earlier, has been to turn center cities into nothing more than havens for white collar jobs, with some enclaves for housing service employees nearby, yet downtown, not Levittown, continues to be where most of the action is. And because that action is an essential ingredient in this country's lifeblood, the nation cannot afford to let its cities fail, notwithstanding the anti-urban bias in all the legislatures and executive branches of Federal and state government.

That we do not really mean to let the cities fail seems clear when we consider the large amounts of money spent in the last few years for new hospitals, schools, art centers and other public facilities in central areas—after a long period of neglect when, for example, nearly all school buildings in New York City were some 50 years old. However grudgingly, money will be provided—at least to prop up the cities, at best (if planners and architects grasp the opportunities) to make them function better than they ever did.

One sign that we are beginning to recognize the indispensability of central cities and the interdependence of city and suburb is the growing number of programs for revitalizing downtown areas—for example, in Kansas City, where some businesses that had moved away have returned to the center, and in Atlanta and St. Louis. In this context, the energy crisis—which will be with us, off and on, for years—may prove to be a blessing in disguise.

In the winter of 1973-74, gasoline shortages were quickly translated into increased downtown retail sales where mass transit was adequate. In the longer run, the need to cut down on wasteful commuting seems bound to give added impetus to the building of decent housing near downtown job concentrations—which in turn may well serve as a shot in the arm for all sorts of amenities there, from restaurants to theaters to pedestrian malls. At the same time, improved public transportation, with no parking hassles, can encourage suburbanites to pursue more of their entertainment, shopping and other leisure-time activities in the city. In this way, city and suburb can be more organically knit together, and the trend to limitless decentralization checked.

The Money Angle

These, then, are the opportunities. To make the most of them, we will need a variety of subsidies and subsidized programs, as discussed earlier. In order of preference, they would be:

- A carefully thought-out system of rent supplements and housing allowances that would allow those in need of help to obtain privately (as well as publicly) built housing in any reasonable location, and next to neighbors of their choice. In an egalitarian, democratic society such as ours aspires to be, this is clearly the most desirable form of assistance yet devised, from just about every point of view. One major objective of our housing policy should be to phase out all projects and programs that visibly and functionally set the poor apart—projects

often designed, built and administered according to standards established by individuals or agencies who are not really familiar with the special needs of poor families.

- Subsidies to reduce the cost of money and land. Such subsidies have long been available to a large portion of the private housing sector, but they have often benefitted the well-to-do more than the poor. Although the general public is painfully aware of high building costs (as well as the somewhat higher initial costs of good planning and design over bad), few people outside the housing industry realize that high mortgage interest rates can double the cost of a building in a dozen years, and that uncontrolled land speculation can raise the ultimate cost of a project more than larger room sizes, better finishes and fixtures or generous communal amenities would do.
- Subsidies to local housing authorities (and, possibly, to private builders) that will enable them to replenish the stock of available housing—either by rehabilitating decayed or abandoned houses or by building new ones. Such subsidies will certainly be needed in conjunction with rent supplements and housing allowances, until there is enough housing in a given area to assure a free choice to most if not all of our people.
- Subsidies for housing maintenance. This possibility is more and more frequently advanced by housing specialists, who point out that the total cost of a building should be computed over a life cycle of 10, 20 or 30 years, during which maintenance costs are likely to surface more and more prominently.
- Subsidies to create mass transit facilities that will provide access to better job opportunities (and other advantages) for those who, for whatever reasons, stick it out in center cities. The policy of supplying almost unlimited Interstate Highway funds to expressway builders while doling out minimal allowances to mass transit systems has contributed more to the disintegration of (and air pollution in) our urban regions than any other single public policy. Thanks to the energy crisis, we seem to be nearing the end of this lopsided approach.

• Grants that will encourage planning and construction of New Towns—preferably New Towns in Town, for reasons explained earlier. Such grants are as essential to the eventual success of our communities, in financial as well as social terms, as research and development investments are to the eventual success of a commercial product. In private industry, the initial, often invisible, costs of any venture are clearly recognized; in the development of New Towns the initial costs may be even less visible and usually are less well understood. Subsidies are needed to finance the invisible intellectual and physical infrastructure for our new communities.

• Grants to finance building research. Government, in the U.S., quite properly subsidizes or undertakes all kinds of explorations, from medical studies to investigations of the potential of the sea bed. The building industry, where at present private "research" is almost entirely limited to market analysis, and governmental "research" to safety standards, desperately needs support for study and experimentation if it is ever to move into the 20th century.

Limits of Government Action

It would be easy to enlarge this shopping list beyond subsidies. Ideally, our entire system of real estate taxation should be revamped to reward, rather than penalize, the land or building owner who spends money to improve his property—and who is currently discouraged from doing so because it would simply increase his taxes. Ideally, land speculation should be brought under effective control, particularly where speculators now make windfall profits solely as a result of public improvements publicly paid for, such as highways or mass transit facilities. Ideally the Federal Government should construct New Towns with a sense of urgency similar to that which went into the construction of Los Alamos and of the Kennedy Space Center. Ideally, too, Federal agencies should establish dimensional and qualitative standards for the building industry, write a national

building code, subsidize prefabrication plants, insure easy payment arrangements for purchasers of prefabricated modules, and provide landfill to create offshore islands at New York, Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles.

Such Total Planning from Up High is not an unfamiliar concept in our century, and in a world of six billion people it may prove indispensable. But the costs, in terms of human freedom and thus of local initiatives, are familiar to us also. That means we must choose between the efficient world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and our accustomed muddling-through system—a system that hasn't served us very well to date, but obviously could be made to work a great deal better.

The question, of course, is "how?" And the answer, one hopes is: through the vision and political will of the people and their decision makers, plus the personal commitment of talented and dedicated planners, architects and designers—of "doers" willing and able to grasp the opportunities available in spite of, or perhaps because of, the social and economic chaos with which we have surrounded ourselves in trying to evade the evils of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Who Will Do It?

Where and how will such men and women be found? And this is really the ultimate, the crucial issue.

However generous and farsighted our programs and subsidies, past, present or future, they will stand or fall with the dedication and competence of those who administer them. In the 1930s and 1940s, the London County Council (now the Greater London Council) managed to attract some of the most dedicated and best-qualified technicians to its rolls. The results, in terms of public responsiveness to private needs, have been impressive. In the U.S., by and large, the record is less good; yet some major cities, under the sometimes accidental leadership of exceptional politicians, have made strides almost as significant.

And so the conclusion of this analysis is an appeal to those who have taken the trouble to read it: to summon the most dedicated, the best qualified and the most imaginative to a cause in dire need of help.

In the first chapter of this book, I quoted a philosopher's saying: "Men come to the city to live; they remain there to live the good life." In this final chapter, I would like to call on citizens to help bring that good life into being. More than ever, individuals must speak out when decisions are made that affect the quality of housing and of life in their communities. Even more important, they must mobilize their organizations—civic associations, political clubs, civil rights groups, unions, trade associations, service clubs, churches, synagogues, veterans' posts or whatever—to seek out the best ideas and make themselves heard on both local and national issues of this sort. Without their commitment—and their clout—our communities will inevitably fail. With it, we have another chance.

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